

Good evening to Senator Osten and Miner and Representative Walker and France: to those of you I am not familiar, it is an honor to be in front of you as well. My name is William Herens from Naugatuck Valley Community College. I am currently a Liberal Arts and Science major with the hopes of one day becoming a Lawyer.

It is a pleasure being here with you tonight, on behalf of the entire community college student body. I mustn't dive into the reasoning I am here too deeply; we all know the community colleges need more funding. With about 72% of our student body on some form of financial aid, it shouldn't be too hard to realize that eventually, we will be asking for help. If any of you have put gas into your car or had bought groceries in the past week, the cost has gone up substantially.

As being a student in the Naugatuck Valley Community College system, our student body is far from wealthy. We serve a community who struggles for money with nearly 30% of our student body identifying as Latino. Most of my classmates are first-generation American's doing their best to contribute to society in the only way they know.

Here's what I do know, I am a non-traditional student who is 29 years old. I pay for my tuition every single semester and the tuition rates are going to go up, yet again. I don't know what it's like choosing between feeding my family and getting an education, but I know for a fact, some of my classmates do daily. Do you know what it's like to struggle each day, wondering where your next bite to eat will come from? I do, I grew up eating off cardboard boxes without utensils to eat with and if it were up to me, no one would be allowed to live through such sullen circumstances.

Being in the work force for more than 10 years a realization had hit me: the only way to progress was by getting an education. Every single staff member in our institution not only

supports my goals and dreams but work their hardest to give me the resources that I need. Resources that cost money, time, and dedication. How naïve it is to think that these things just won't run out. If you didn't know, the higher education system of Connecticut's Community Colleges is in desperate need. If the problems that we are facing are not tended to, the public's education will be put at risk of failure. This knowledge weighs on my mind every day, fearing the consequences of our future. Pending on the trust we have for the Government to help secure the future of every attendant of our college.

I am asking you on behalf of the entire student body, please help us secure our future. Please remember us when you decide to write your bill for the next fiscal year. Please fight for the future of the state, a future that will be willing to pay it forward to the next generation. Through education, we can build a stronger and better environment for those who follow in our footsteps.

Have a good night and thank you for your time.

Will